

Stephan van Erp

INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

Systematic theology after Schillebeeckx

Fifty years ago, Edward Schillebeeckx wrote an article on the new turn in the systematic theology of his day in the very first issue of his own journal, *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*.¹ This new turn consisted of a 'living attention to the historically new in confrontation with faith, as well as in the new states of thought, created by and in a human experience that is forever expressing itself anew in this world, for example in modern literature and in philosophy.'² Schillebeeckx believed that this attention to the historically new will result in a double focus for modern theology. On the one hand, modern faith seems to indicate new theological modes of thought that need articulation and clarification. On the other, a changing faith forces us to reflect upon the renewals old theological achievements will undergo as a result of new influences. This is what gives modern systematic theology its double focus: on both the future and the past. Schillebeeckx repeatedly emphasises that the truth of old theology will not be lost as a result of the dynamics of a changing faith, but is instead purified and differentiated, and sometimes even corrected. He believes that systematic theology is the theological discipline *par excellence* to guide and reflect upon this growth. With that, the task of systematic theology has explicitly and fundamentally been determined as a historical one, ever since the middle of the twentieth century: both by safeguarding old theological truths and by reflecting on the experiences of the historically new in the present and the future.

¹ E. Schillebeeckx, "De nieuwe wending in de huidige Dogmatiek", in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 1 (1961), 17–47.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

What seemed to be a new and promising discovery to Schillebeeckx – allowing the content of theology to be codetermined by contemporary religious experiences and practices – may seem self-evident to the current generation of theologians, but has not lost its urgency. These times have become much more difficult to interpret by means of a theological scheme than any before them, however. There seems to be a virtually unbridgeable chasm with the past. Any attempt to bridge it seems to misinterpret the signs of the time or too hastily find similarities with the past. Systematic theology is the main theological discipline that risks making these mistakes, precisely because of the interwovenness of the historical and the topical. A survey of modern systematic theology will show that there are roughly two camps: one that seeks to safeguard old insights and one that mainly seeks the content of faith in our modern age. Fifty years on, Schillebeeckx's commitment to consider the interwovenness of present and past a central theme of systematic theology with a view to the future, seems to have become nearly impossible.

In this article, I will investigate the possibilities of a systematic theology after Schillebeeckx that interprets the modern condition of faith from the perspective of the history of church and theology and will reinterpret that history from the perspectives of the present. I will focus on developments in theology over the last fifty years. First, I will describe how the attention for the present did initially lead to a flourishing of modern systematic theology, contextual theology and a theology of culture (1). Next, I will outline the possibilities of a renewed influence of Schillebeeckx's theology on new generations of theologians (2).

1. The present as the motif for modern theology

1.1. *Anthropology and Christology*

Let us first take a look at Schillebeeckx's 'new turn'. One of the most important insights he derived from phenomenology of his day was the anthropocentric idea that human consciousness is a consciousness that has been incarnated in the world and in the body: 'it enters the world by means of the act in which it constitutes itself, in which it presents itself to this part of worldly reality that is our own biological-sensitive physicality'.³ He used this non-dualist, constructive concept of the human person

³ Ibid., 26.

realising itself in the world to outline the, as he saw them, ‘revolutionary’ consequences to modern systematic theology, particularly to Christology, Mariology, the doctrine of grace, ecclesiology and eschatology. He believes that the various different dogmatic tracts have undergone a radical change as a result of new ideas about the personhood of God and man and new ideas about the human experience of the relationship between God and man.

This ‘antropologisation’ of dogmatics has led to many misunderstandings and debates. The main misunderstanding, which also has been applied to Schillebeeckx’s own theology, is that theology now supposedly gains an anthropological basis and will therefore entirely explain and constitute faith on the basis of human experience, as a consequence of which even theological concepts like revelation and grace are no longer considered the result of divine action, but subjective projections, devoid from any measure of reality. This is an incorrect inference, at least where Schillebeeckx’s own theology is involved: ‘In fact, the *locus theologicus*, even of the belief in creation, is the personal human history of the historical Christ.’⁴ The incarnational pivot of the history of salvation must therefore be the precondition of faith and theology, he believes. Experiencing that history of salvation is not merely a human project, it is the result of divine action. This plan for salvation involves man in such a way that he can freely realize himself in it. So even in an anthropologically inspired theology like Schillebeeckx’s, the primacy lies with divine revelation in history, even though this is always mediated by human experience. The antropologisation of modern theology went hand in hand with a growing interest in Christology. According to Schillebeeckx, the first and most fundamental question is that for the mystery of faith, ‘the revelation of reality itself, with which we are confronted personally through the light of faith.’⁵ He believed that this revelation of reality was by definition historical, a key moment in the life and death of Jesus Christ. That is why the study of Christology offers the best insights into the relation between nature and grace.

The discussion about the foundations of faith has largely determined theological debate over the past fifty years.⁶ It explains the great interest in dogmatics at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century.

⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Cf. T. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, New York – London: T. & T. Clark, 2005.

The deciding question whether revelation or experience comes first in theology, and what the special role of the historical person of Christ is, led to an entrenchment of different theological schools that determines the theological landscape to this day. The decision to either take revelation or history (including current experiences) as the foundation of theological debate does after all also determine the subject and the method of theological research.

1.2. Apologetics and the theology of culture

Subject and method of theology do not just change because of changing ideas about the foundations of faith, but also as a result of a growing awareness of the various different addressees of theology and the theologians social position. In addition to the fundamental question of the relation between revelation and, the question for religious practices and audiences also became an important one. This, in turn, showed the importance of theological communication and perspective, which had dramatic consequences for the language of dogmatics. Communication and audience are aspects that seemed less urgent to Schillebeeckx in 1961 because the connections between church, university and society in catholic Nijmegen were much clearer and much more self-evident. The situation had changed dramatically twenty years later. The secularisation of western culture now posed a real problem to church and theology. It led to the development of applied theological communication in a changing, pluralist culture. That is why in the 1980s, David Tracy distinguished three types of audiences for theology – church, university, society – and arranged the various different theological disciplines and methods accordingly. It would mean, for example, a fundament theology that is rather more focussed on the discussion with other sciences and a practical theology that is rather more focussed on ecclesiastical developments.⁷ The result was a multiplication of theological tasks, because the field of study was expanded outside the original religious community and tradition.⁸

This attention for the diversity of theological audiences has not just influenced the development of different forms of theological communication and the adaptation of theological language and method depending

⁷ D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York 1981.

⁸ Cf. L. Boeve, "Theology at the Crossroads of Academy, Church and Society", in: *ET-Studies: Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology* 1 (2010), 71–90.

on the discussion partner. Some believe that the expanded field of action of the theologian has also opened up new perspectives on the content of faith, which in turn has led to changing interpretations of theological concepts. After Schillebeeckx, this theological position has been developed further by Lieven Boeve and Erik Borgman in the Dutch-speaking countries. Boeve has used the concept of ‘interruption’, which on the one hand describes God’s actions in this world, particularly in a day and age in which the Christian story is no longer taken for granted. On the other hand, this divine interruption of history calls upon people to interrupt the world themselves.⁹ According to Boeve, this double interruption ultimately leads to a continuous recontextualisation of theology.

Borgman calls his project a ‘theology of culture’. He claims to have derived its statute from Schillebeeckx’s early theology and the theologies of Marie-Dominique Chenu and ultimately that of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ What is at stake in this ‘theology of culture’ is a religious interpretation of contemporary culture, assuming that everything that exists is part of God’s creation and as such part of the history of salvation. This theology does not regard tradition and the community of the church as a given that requires interpretation, but as living forms of community that are constantly renewed and provide the dynamic, ever-changing subject for theology. The result is a type of dogmatics that is focussed on the future and is inherently eschatological. As faith keeps renewing itself, dogmatics can never have the final say and is therefore, by definition, incomplete. It leads to a new style of theology that no longer presents integral, systematic tracts, but is instead essayist by nature.

1.3. Ressourcement and retraditionalisation

Late-twentieth century theology has also seen a backlash against the development of anthropological and cultural theologies. Many wildly divergent theological schools harboured a discontent with the rise of historical and hermeneutical theology. Both theologians who build their work on

⁹ L. Boeve, “Edward Schillebeeckx & de actuele theologie: Een reflectie ‘in media res’”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 50 (2010), 27–50, here 34. Cf. idem, *Onderbroken traditie: Heeft het christelijk verhaal nog toekomst?*, Kapellen 1999; idem, *God onderbreekt de geschiedenis: Theologie in een tijd van ommekeer*, Kapellen 2006.

¹⁰ E. Borgman, *Metamorfosen: Over religie en moderne cultuur*, Kampen 2006, 19–22. Cf. idem, “Identiteit verwachten: Van theologische antropologie naar cultuurtheologie”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 42 (2002), 174–196; idem, *... want de plaats waarop je staat is heilige grond: God als onderzoeksprogramma*, Amsterdam 2008.

Karl Barth's orthodox, ecclesiastical theology, and those who belong to new postmodern, neo-augustinian schools, are concerned with what they regard as the degeneration of dogmatics in modern theology.¹¹ Instead of culture or the contemporary, the religious practises of a religious community should determine the theological agenda.¹² There have been more and more orthodox, ecclesiastical, postmodern and restorationist theologians since the 1970s. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, restoration movements started to emerge in the catholic church. In protestant theology, barthian theologians like C. Gunton, W. Placher, R. Jenson, T.F. Torrance and J. Webster, explicitly concentrate on the central doctrines of dogmatics, the doctrine of the trinity in particular. To the amazement of continental theologians, this has made a strong comeback in Anglo-American theology.¹³ Followers of the most conspicuous theological school of the moment, *Radical Orthodoxy*, have fought the rise of social sciences within theology and made the case for a theological rather than a philosophical or social-theoretical foundation for the reflection on faith, in particular the idea of God's gift in creation.¹⁴ In the 1990s, post-liberal theologians turned against the rationalism of critical philosophy and claimed that theology ultimately has no rational foundation.

Regardless of the wide divergence of these schools, they all make extensive use of pre-modern sources, like the theologies of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin. For this reason, this theological trend could be regarded as an Anglo-Saxon continuation of the French *nouvelle théologie* from the 1940s and 50s. Another thing this resourcement has in common with *nouvelle théologie*, is its emphasis on the development of a constructive or positive theology.¹⁵ There is, however, one important difference with this catholic school. The theologians who together formed the *nouvelle théologie*, were interested in a stronger connection between theology and the contemporary church, and they were in favour of making tradition more dynamic. Instead, the recent resourcement movements are

¹¹ Cf. J. Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval", in: J. Webster et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Oxford 2007, 583–599.

¹² Cf. St. Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, Grand Rapids 2001.

¹³ Cf. C. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, London 1997². See also G. van den Brink / St. van Erp, "Ignoring God Triune?: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Dutch Theology", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009), 72–90.

¹⁴ J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford 1990; J. Milbank et al. (Eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, London 1999.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, London – New York 2010.

rather more interested in reviving the theological sources of the early church and what they consider to be original reflections of the Word of God.

Such a retraditionalisation in theology has almost entirely failed to establish itself in the Netherlands and Flanders. Had it managed to establish itself, it could have led to an increased interest in dogmatics in the Low Countries, albeit in a way that is diametrically opposed to the intention of Schillebeeckx's article of 1961. After all, his aim was the integration of the historically new in theological reflection without sacrificing the continuity with the past. In that case, mere resourcement will not suffice. Contemporary practises and experiences of faith continue to pose new theological questions, and ever since the Second Vatican Council there has been an explicit ecclesiastical order to take these questions seriously.

2. Edward Schillebeeckx's lasting influence

Next, we need to consider what exactly Schillebeeckx's influence on new generations of theologians can or could be, given the current theological context described above. Shortly after his death, some people claimed that Schillebeeckx's theology would soon be forgotten. Whether this will actually happen, remains to be seen, but we need to recognize that he lived in an age and a culture that was very different from ours. This is what motivated his biographer Erik Borgman to present Schillebeeckx's work against the background of his own history. By putting theological issues and controversies of the twentieth century in their cultural context, Borgman tried to offer an insight into the way in which Schillebeeckx was influenced by his age, and how he in turn has influenced that age. In doing so, the biographer presupposed that it would allow this theologian of a past age to become a discussion partner for the current generation again. Borgman believes that, although Schillebeeckx's ideas have become somewhat dated by later social and ecclesiastical developments, they are essentially not superseded.¹⁶ That is rather a categorical thing to say about a theologian who himself kept emphasising the inseparable connection between theological content and the cultural context in which it is developed. Taking Schillebeeckx's hermeneutics seriously, we may need

¹⁶ E. Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in his History*. Vol. 1: *A Catholic Theology of Culture, 1914–1965*, transl. by J. Bowden, London – New York: Continuum, 2003, 9–25, 23.

to recognise that since the discovery of context and practise of faith as theological starting point, theology has constantly needed to reassess its stance towards the time in which it comes about. The logical conclusion would be that any theology that went before has therefore become superseded as soon the new theology is introduced. Is this the tragic consequence of hermeneutic theology: has it become superseded in accordance with its own principles of perspectivity and contextuality, as soon as the culture which produced it was over?

2.1. Dated, but not superseded: the obstinacy of Schillebeeckx's theology

The extent Schillebeeckx's influence on theology is not undisputed. Some regard his thinking as exemplary of the twentieth century which is now over. They see him as an adherent of the liberal theology that is now supposed to have failed; too partial to the historical-critical method and too concerned with the adaptation of Christian faith to the spirit of the times. This the image people usually have of Schillebeeckx: a liberal, modern theologian who, open to human experience and cultural context, has adapted theology to the modern age; somebody who paid more attention to the history of man than to the infinity of God; a theologian of practice, rather than of theory. Whether this is regarded as a positive or a negative description depends on the theological disposition and the theological school to which one belongs. Those polarising filters based on criteria like the importance of experience, practice and history have split theology after Schillebeeckx into schools and movements.¹⁷ This compartmentalisation has also had consequences for the position of individual theologians. Schillebeeckx was deemed to belong to the liberal side, which meant that his work would be received by either a liberal sympathiser or a critical opponent. It meant that in the era after ideological criticism, theology became more and more ideological. Theology after Schillebeeckx became politicized to such an extent that prior to a theological opinion, a fundamental-theological identification was required. The main question was whether one was orthodox or liberal, *foundational* or *postfoundational*, analytic or hermeneutic, historically critical or diachronous, scholarly or ecclesiastical, traditional or modern, etcetera. Such a forced positioning leads to an unfortunate reductionism when applied to a theologian like Schillebeeckx, because his theology cannot really be categorised in such a way.

¹⁷ Cf. H. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, New Haven 1992, 28–55.

The reception of Schillebeeckx's work was also vulnerable because it has never had a large following and because he never attempted to form a school, unlike people such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is, however, much less common in theology than in philosophy to confess to a certain school or to explicitly declare oneself the follower of one individual thinker. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Schillebeeckx has on the one hand influenced many different theological positions, yet on the other seems to have become marginalised because of this. I use the word 'seems', because one of the reasons why the long-term effect of Schillebeeckx's ideas is so difficult to trace, is because they have become generally accepted. Meanwhile, the concepts of history and experience he helped to introduce as foundations for a theological method and as sources particular to theology, are now considered to be self-evident by many.

Few however fully consider the consequences of this self-evidence, namely the fact that it allows for a sacramental interpretation of the present and of practice. Many theologians in Flanders and in the Netherlands are – often without realising it – indebted to the historical and critical methods of thinkers like Schillebeeckx, but only few contemporary theologians know that these methods had a theological foundation. The result is a theology after Schillebeeckx that tries to relate to contemporary culture, just like he did. He tried to find new forms of what he called 'salvation-coming-from-God', but this is no longer a criterion befitting 21st century theology. A new generation of theologians tries to find 'the theological' in culture, without actually knowing what to look for or where to look for it. This leads some to conclude that the theological is absent in modern culture. Others do see analogies of faith in modern cultural expressions and life styles, but those analogies are based on language and on phenomena, instead of on a theory of divine intervention history, as Schillebeeckx saw them.

Although he has often been criticised for too strongly founding his theology on revelation, Schillebeeckx had even more often been criticised for the opposite. These critiques propose that he went too far in founding faith and the tradition of the church on human experience, as a result of which God's role would be finished. His emphasis on human experience is indeed the result of a fundamental philosophical consideration of modern epistemology and metaphysics and the theological recognition of the social-cultural and historical-political constellation as a source. In his earlier works, however, Schillebeeckx always reserves pride of place

for the concept of '*revelation*', and in his later works he increasingly qualifies this term with the concept of '*salvation*'. Revelation and salvation, like *history*, the *humanum* and *experience* are central concepts in his theology. The last three have to some extent played a leading part, because particularly at the council, they were presented to the church and world of his time as a challenge and an instruction to modern man. Revelation and experience were not regarded as a hierarchy, as each other's extension, however, but as a symbol of each other, inextricably connected, but not reducible to each other. The council and later also Schillebeeckx himself have undoubtedly theologically raised the status of the history of human experience, but always from the perspective of human existence as a sign of the love of God – a primarily *theological* idea therefore, which Schillebeeckx would later also provide with a solid Christological foundation.

Christology has also been a reason to be critical about the influence of Schillebeeckx's theology. His historical-critical method has caused a lot of criticism, which resurfaced in and as a result of the publication of Joseph Ratzinger's *Jesus Christ*. It should be mentioned that exegesis has strongly developed since the 1970s, and this has meant that the historical-critical method has lost its innovative force and has in fact been sidetracked. Schillebeeckx would probably have been the first to recognise this. He was not really an advocate of the historical-critical method, but he did believe that current developments in exegesis should have their consequences in dogmatics. His own use of the historical-critical method is not intended to give preference to the historical Jesus over the preached Jesus, it is an attempt to connect the theological question for *the truth of God* to the new developments in historical and empirical method. He took the scientific and scholarly developments of his day very serious, to such an extent that people now call his theology dated because of it. Nevertheless, the interest in texts and the history of the first century has boomed since his day. Had he lived in the 21st century, Schillebeeckx would surely have used the latest insights from those studies in his theology.

2.2. *A theological understanding of faith now: the promise of Schillebeeckx's theology*

So how do we continue to build on the work of Schillebeeckx who focused his theology on the culture and the age in which he developed it? He has left us a theological heritage that is rich in materials and subjects and urgently requires further investigation. Meanwhile, there have been over eighty doctoral theses on his work, and it seems likely that more are

yet to follow. An eleven part collection of his works in English will soon be published, and it is likely that this will generate new research too. Further research into Schillebeeckx role and importance during and after the Second Vatican Council is needed, for example. In what way have Edward Schillebeeckx's lectures and articles influenced the documents of the Council? In what way has his interpretation of those council documents influenced his later theological hermeneutics and ecclesiology? What is the meaning of his theology of the universality of Christ in a religiously pluralistic culture? Has his emphasis on historicity, spirituality and experiences of suffering changed the study of religion and faith? As I have pointed out before, the main question for the evaluation of his theological point of view will remain whether Edward Schillebeeckx was a liberal or an orthodox theologian. How does his form of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, in his words 'the sought-after humanum, promised to us in Christ, which has to be performed', relate to the current re-emergence of fundamentalism and neo-orthodoxy in theology and religion? And where does this Flemish theologian from Nijmegen fit into his time and age, among the great catholic theologians of the twentieth century: Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Hans Küng? Who will the new theological generation choose to be guided by? Schillebeeckx most certainly deserves to be considered for this role.

For his work to be suited for this role, the contextual difference between his time and ours needs to be bridged. The theological understanding of faith now is rather different from that of 1983, to moment at which Schillebeeckx held his valedictory speech upon leaving the Catholic University of Nijmegen. At a point in his life were he could have presented a retrospective of his work or a vision for the future of theology, Schillebeeckx explicitly chose to analyse the present. This choice is a direct result of the influence the documents of the Second Vatican Council have had on his theology. Particularly in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, this Council formulated a vision on the freedom and the responsibility of humanity in a changing world and on the role and the place of the church in solidarity with that world. The current states of faith, science and culture thus became a mission for church and theology. Schillebeeckx has allowed his theological agenda to be determined by those events. He did not do so by simply updating or adapting the content of faith to the times, like many of his contemporaries did, but by acknowledging the present as a source of theology. In keeping with the spirit of

the Council, he considered the present itself to be the time and the place in which God's creation is continued, in which Scripture and tradition are continued in new forms and a new language and in which the relationship between God and man gains a future. This present in which the Word of God can be heard in creation, Scripture and the living language of tradition and faith is the motif par excellence of modern theology, according to Schillebeeckx.

He defines the task of theology as finding a proper balance between tradition and situation. This does seem increasingly difficult to achieve in the current situation, however. Not only has the social-cultural and religious situation changed dramatically, tradition too has seen some radical changes. The most important difference with Schillebeeckx's day is perhaps that the church finds itself more and more compelled to present itself as a critical opposition to a materialist and relativist culture, and to oppose the religious point of view to others. The world has become a religious battleground and religious convictions have not just become the subject of criticism from other religious convictions, but also as religious convictions as such. Schillebeeckx's conflict avoidance strategy that aims to find a critical coherence of tradition and situation, may leave some space for diversity and discontinuity *in* tradition, but it might not be equal to a situation in which individual religious points of view are considered to be sparks that could set off the powder keg of a easily ignitable culture, and are therefore best kept private. The opening he tried to maintain between faith and a culture now often seems to be closed. Contemporary theology can either position itself at one end of that opening or try to find openings that enable a new confirmation and realisation of the continuity between tradition and situation. The promise of Schillebeeckx's theology lies in the success of that constructive contribution to culture which contemporary theology itself makes.

Theology, as Schillebeeckx put it, moves between tradition and situation by means of reason, *unlocking truth* and *criticising ideology*.¹⁸ And because he considered the situation, contemporary culture, to be the place where God acts, he deemed it of the utmost importance that theology should more extensively relate to philosophy, literary and historical sciences, religious sciences and social sciences. The exposition of his own theological frame of mind can thus be read as programme for the future of theology in close cooperation with other sciences which has not lost its

¹⁸ E. Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch geloofsverstaan anno 1983*. Afscheidscollege gegeven op vrijdag 11 februari 1983, Baarn 1983, 7.

validity. As an analysis of the dynamic present – as the time and place of God in history – theology is not just a committed academic discipline, it is also a discipline that critically and constructively investigates the commitment of the sciences, church and society.

Schillebeeckx was convinced that theology could thus find a place in both the world of science and that of the church, and that it has its own special role in both these worlds. Amidst the other sciences, it uniquely takes its own practical and religious commitment as the subject of its investigation. Within the church, it reflects on its own commitment to God. As a scientific reflection, it does have its own, rightful place in the community of faith. By explicitly following these two tracks, by, on the one hand, taking its own religious commitment as the inspiration and subject of investigation, and on the other ensuring that this investigation meets the highest academic standards, Edward Schillebeeckx has shown that science and religion do not preclude each other. This is what makes him a shining example, even in a time of religious changes and conflicts that need clarification and understanding.

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Zusammenfassung des Beitrags von Stephan van Erp

Seit Edward Schillebeeckx vor 50 Jahren die *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* ins Leben rief, hat die moderne Theologie Aufstieg und Fall erlebt. Mit seinem Eröffnungsartikel aus dem Jahr 1961 war er einer der Ersten, der die Herausforderungen für die moderne Theologie in Worte fasste. Ihm zufolge liefert die ständig sich verändernde und somit jeweils neue Gegenwart das dynamische Material für die Theologie. Die Entdeckung der Geschichtlichkeit in ihren verschiedenen Formen von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft gab den Impuls zur Entwicklung neuer Theologien, welche sich seitdem als sehr einflussreich erwiesen haben. Das Konzept der Geschichtlichkeit trug zu einer neuen Verbindung von Anthropologie und Christologie bei. Darüber hinaus führte das Bewusstsein der Kontextualität und der Sozialität des Theologen zur Erarbeitung einer kommunikativen Theologie, die sich jeweils ihren Adressaten anpassen konnte.

Kontextuelle Theologien entstanden, die dann in eine Theologie der Rekontextualisierung (Boeve) und eine Theologie der Kultur (Borgman) ausdifferenziert wurden. Eine gegen diese neuen anthropologischen und kontextuellen Entwicklungslinien gerichtete Reaktion stellten die neoorthodoxen und retraditionalistischen Theologien dar, wie beispielsweise die Theologie Karl Barths und die radikale Orthodoxie von John Milbank, die sich derzeit als sehr einflussreich erweisen.

Der Autor dieses Beitrags schlägt die Inkarnation in ihrer geschichtlichen und eschatologischen Gestalt als neues Leitmotiv für die systematische Theologie nach Schillebeeckx vor. Dies wird damit begründet, dass am Ende weder die kritische Vernunft, noch die Hermeneutik (unabhängig davon, ob kontextuelle, biblische oder ekklesiologische), noch die Tradition Ausgangspunkt für eine dogmatische Theologie sein können – anders, als die fortlaufende geschichtliche Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus, die sich in menschlicher Zeit und menschlichem Raum jeweils neu erweist. Auf der Arbeit von Schillebeeckx aufbauend wird eine systematische Theologie skizziert, die in einer Gemeinschaft verwurzelt ist, in welcher die geschichtliche Präsenz der Inkarnation eine Zukunft konstituiert, die Gottes Zukunft in dieser Welt ist.

Übersetzung aus dem Englischen: *Bernhard Kohl*